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FM AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5002  
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABIDJAN 000178

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/17/2019

TAGS: PGOV KDEM PREL IV

SUBJECT: OUATTARA SEES LACK OF WILL TO HOLD ELECTIONS

Classified By: PolEcon Chief Silvia Eiriz for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary. RDR president Ouattara told Ambassador that President Gbagbo has no political will to hold an election and is taking steps to delay the process. Ouattara said it is technically feasible to hold the presidential election in 2009 and urged the international community to send a stronger message regarding establishment of an electoral date. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Ambassador called on RDR political party president and former Prime Minister Alassane Ouattara March 16 to discuss delays in the electoral process and the opposition's apparent acceptance of the failure to set a new election date. Ouattara told Ambassador without hesitation that President Gbagbo does not want to hold an election and is even attempting to delay it. He said that putting off elections also benefits some individuals in the Prime Minister's office as well as those in government institutions, such as the National Assembly, whose mandates have expired. Ouattara stated that Gbagbo's electoral base represents only 12 to 15 percent of the population, making a Gbagbo victory impossible in the absence of an alliance with a larger party. The RDR leader confirmed that Gbagbo has been unable to breach the agreement between him and PDCI leader and former president Henri Bedie to support each other against Gbagbo if the election goes to a second round. Ouattara scoffed at the idea of an alliance with Gbagbo, saying they have nothing in common while he and Bedie remain committed to Houphouet-Boigny's principles.

ELECTION SHOULD NOT BE TIED TO RESOLVING MILITARY QUESTIONS

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¶3. (C) Ouattara expressed concern about linking the election to a resolution of military disputes between the government and the Forces Nouvelles (FAFN), noting that the country has been relatively peaceful for several years. He thought that security for the election could be assured if the two sides were committed to it. Ouattara also complained that military issues were being linked to the election but had never even been on the agenda of a CPC meeting. (The Permanent Consultation Framework (CPC) of the Ouagadougou Political Agreement (OPA) includes Ouattara, Bedie, Gbagbo, Soro and Facilitator Compaore and meets periodically to assess the progress of the OPA.) Ouattara said the military questions only concern the two former belligerents while the election concerns the entire political class. He also noted that the country is no longer truly divided. The President and the Prime Minister travel freely throughout the country and there is no concern about the candidates' ability to campaign nationwide.

¶4. (C) Ouattara told the Ambassador there is no technical reason preventing a presidential election in 2009. He said Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) president Mambe has formulated an electoral timeline that envisions September 27, 2009 as election day, proof that an election is possible this year. The next step, Ouattara said, should be to set a definitive end date for the identification/voter registration

process. He agreed that the process was critical but said most countries have a fixed voter registration period and Cote d'Ivoire should too. He also remarked that more persons have been registered to vote thus far than the total number of persons on the 2000 electoral list. Ouattara doubted that the reconstitution of civil registries would ultimately affect more than 50,000 voters and thought this process as well as the registration of Ivoirians living overseas could be completed by the end of April. He calculated that the draft electoral list could be compiled by the end of May with the final list ready by the end of June and elections three months later. He agreed, however, that President Gbagbo would ultimately have to consent, noting wryly that regardless of the feasibility of holding an election in 2009, a presidential decree would have to be signed before one could actually take place.

OPPOSITION DOESN'T HAVE A STRATEGY

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15. (C) Ambassador told Ouattara that the USG's position remains that elections should be held as soon as possible and that we will continue to pressure the Gbagbo government to hold elections this year. She noted that it is difficult, however, for the international community to convince the government to move more quickly when the opposition appears to be satisfied with the pace of activity. Ouattara agreed that the international community should not be seen as trying to impose elections on Cote d'Ivoire and said he is aware that the political opposition sometimes appears to be complicit in the electoral delay. He explained that he has not publicly exerted pressure on the government to set a date

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because it was important to allow the identification process to move forward. He also reminded Ambassador that several hundred people were killed the last time the opposition launched a major protest. No one wants a repeat of that experience. Ouattara said he plans to meet Bedie in a few days to establish a common position regarding the establishment of an electoral date. He said he would also ask Compaore to allow the CEI to announce an election date if the government fails to do so.

16. (C) One of the several rumors circulating in Abidjan is that President Gbagbo may step down if he stays in office until 2010 as he will have completed two terms by then. Ouattara dismissed this conjecture; he thought it more likely that Gbagbo would seek two more terms. Ouattara said it was important for the international community to send a strong message about setting a new date for elections and suggested United Nations Security Council resolutions as a mechanism to do so. Ambassador asked Ouattara if there are any African leaders that Gbagbo would listen to and who might push for elections. Aside from President Compaore, Ouattara could think of none.

17. (C) Ouattara expressed dismay at Cote d'Ivoire's economic stagnation due to the political crisis. He said he is tired of the stalemate and expressed frustration at his inability to significantly contribute to his country's welfare and development. He even wondered whether he'd made a mistake in leaving the IMF to return to politics in Cote d'Ivoire.

18. (C) Comment: It is ironic that it is Ouattara who is calling for the identification process to end since this issue is one of paramount importance to his constituents, and must reflect his confidence that his party has registered more than enough voters to secure a win. Ouattara seemed convinced that Gbagbo's FPI party is dragging their feet because they know they cannot win and doubted that the FPI would be able to register a significantly greater number of supporters. Most striking, however, is the fact the opposition appears to have no strategy for pushing President Gbagbo closer to elections and is relying on President Compaore and the international community to persuade the

Ivoirian leader to hold elections.  
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